



RISK ASSESSMENT

A Guide to Risk Assessment.

INTRODUCTION.

A RISK is the likelihood of a hazard occurring.

A HAZARD is anything (e.g. chemical, electricity, working on a ladder etc) that could cause harm.

Risk assessments need to be carried out by employers to comply with health and safety legal requirements, notably the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. All work needs to be considered and significant risks need to be identified, controlled and recorded. The records should be kept for immediate reference within the vicinity where it applies and a copy kept in each department's master file.

The purpose of completing risk assessments is to enable the employer to determine what measures need to be taken to eliminate and to control risk and, by acting on the findings, to demonstrate that the employer's duty of care is fulfilled. Risk assessments allow decisions to be taken as to the priority of remedial actions; so for instance any high risk that is identified should be dealt with promptly.

SUITABLE AND SUFFICIENT.

Risk Assessments are legally required to be 'suitable and sufficient'.

There is no precise definition in the Regulations. However it is necessary for risk assessments to do the following:

- Identify all the hazards present
- evaluate the associated risks, disregarding trivial and inconsequential risks
- consider the severity of the consequences and the chance it could happen
- identify all persons (including staff, contractors, visitors) at risk
- take account of the control measures
- identify any specific legal duty or requirement relating to the risk
- remain valid for a specified period of time

- provide sufficient information to enable the employer to decide on remedial measures and their priority.

The level of risk arising from the work activity should determine the detail and nature of the risk assessment.

Low Risk Departments.

For departments with low risks, an adequate assessment is a straightforward process based on informed judgement and reference to the appropriate guidance.

Departments with Significant Risks.

Departments are expected to take reasonable steps to help themselves identify risks, e.g. by consulting Codes of Practice and Guidance, suppliers' or manufacturers' manuals, safety data sheets. The risk assessment should include only what a department could reasonably expect to know.

The Safety Office supplies advice on health and safety matters and can assist with risk assessments. It is the responsibility of departments to do their own risk assessment; the Safety Office is not responsible for the completion of the risk assessments.

HOW TO DO A RISK ASSESSMENT.

There are no fixed ways to do a risk assessment, in fact it will depend on the nature of the work and the types of hazard and risk. Risk assessment should involve local managers. It needs to be practical, taking account of the views of staff and others who have knowledge and experience of the work being risk assessed. In the first instance a basic risk assessment should be conducted using the 5 Steps approach described below and recorded on a Risk Assessment form. This approach is that promoted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Simple Guide to Risk Assessment – 5 Steps.

STEP 1 - Look for the Hazards.

If you are doing the assessment yourself, walk around your workplace and look afresh at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm. Ignore trivial risks that could occur and concentrate only those that could result in serious harm or affect several people. Ask your employees or their representatives what they think. They may have noticed things which are not immediately obvious. Manufacturers' instructions or datasheets can also help spot hazards and put risks in their true perspective. So can accident and ill-health records.

STEP 2 - Decide who might be harmed, and how.

In addition to staff, think about people who may be in the workplace all the time, e.g. cleaners, visitors, contractors, maintenance personnel, etc. Include members of the public, or people you share your work place with, if there is a chance they could be hurt by your activities.

There is no need to list individuals by name – consider groups of persons doing similar work or who may be affected similarly. Pay particular attention to vulnerable persons:

- Staff and visitors with disabilities
- Inexperienced staff
- Lone workers
- Pregnant workers
- Young people
- Visitors

STEP 3 - Evaluate the risks arising from the hazards and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done.

Even after all precautions have been taken, usually some risks remain. What you have to decide for each significant hazard is whether the residual risk is high, medium or low (See below - Evaluation of the Risk).

First, ask yourself whether you have done all the things that the law says you have got to do. For example, there are legal requirements on prevention of access to dangerous parts of machinery. Then, ask yourself whether generally accepted industry standards are in place. But don't stop there – think for yourself, because the law also says that you must do what is reasonably practicable to keep your workplace safe. Your real aim is to make all risks small by adding to your precautions if necessary. More information about legal requirements and standards can be found in HSE publications such as Management of Health and Safety at Work: Approved Codes of Practice, essentials of Health and Safety and other useful publications, available from the Safety Office.

Improving health and safety need not cost a lot. For instance, placing a mirror on a dangerous blind corner to help prevent vehicle accidents, or putting some non-slip material on slippery steps, are inexpensive precautions considering the risks.

If you find that something needs to be done, ask yourself:

- a. Can I get rid of the hazard altogether?
- b. If not, how can I control the risks so that harm is unlikely?

Only use personnel protective equipment when there is nothing else that you can reasonably do.

If the work you do tends to vary a lot, or if you or your employees move from one site to another, select those hazards, which you can reasonably foresee and assess the risks from them. After that, if you spot any unusual hazard when you get to a place, get information from others on site and take what action seems necessary.

If you share a workplace, tell the other Heads of Department, about any risks your work could affect and those they are responsible for. Note what precautions you are taking. Also, think about the risks to your workforce from those who share your workplace.

STEP 4 - Record your findings.

This means (1) writing down the more significant hazards and (2) recording your most important conclusions – for example, 'portable electrical equipment inspected and tested and found sound' or 'fume from welding: local exhaust ventilation provided and regularly checked.' You must also inform your staff about your findings.

There is no need to show how you did the assessment provided you can show that:

- a proper check was made
- you detailed who might be affected
- you dealt with all the obvious significant hazards, taking account the number of people who could be involved
- the precautions are reasonable, and the remaining risk is low.

Assessments need to be suitable and sufficient, not perfect. The real points are:

- are the precautions reasonable
- is there something to show that a proper check was made?

Keep the written document for future reference or use. It can help you if an inspector questions your precautions, and particularly if you become involved in any action for civil liability. It can also remind you to keep an eye on particular matters and it helps to show that you have done what the law requires.

To make things simpler, you may refer to other documents, such as manuals, and departmental procedures. These may already list hazards and precautions. You don't need to repeat all that, and it is up to you whether you combine all the documents, or keep them separate.

STEP 5 - Review your Risk Assessment from time to time and revise as necessary.

Sooner or later you will bring in new machines, substances and procedures that could lead to new hazards. If there is any significant change, you should add to the assessment to take account of the new hazard. In any case, it is good practice to review your assessment from time to time. Don't amend your assessment for every trivial change, or still more, for each new job, but if a new job introduces significant new hazards of its own, you will want to consider them in their own right and do whatever you need to keep the risks down.

Getting help.

It is legal requirement to assess risks. In the unlikely event that you get stuck on the assessment you may contact the Safety Office.

EVALUATION OF THE RISK.

There are many ways to evaluate the level of risk. Risk level or rating is considered to be determined by two factors – first, the likelihood or frequency that a mishap will occur and, secondly, the severity of the consequence or outcome of the event.

SUMMARY.

- The Head of Department is responsible for ensuring that the legal requirement to carry out of risk assessments for the department activities is met.
- The assessment needs to be suitable and sufficient.
- The assessment should identify:
 1. The hazards
 2. Who are at risk
 3. The control measures to be used
 4. The adequacy of the controls
 5. The date of the assessment review
- The assessment must be recorded,
- The control measures must be applied
- Those persons at risk must be informed of the hazards and risks and the actions to be taken to safeguard their health and safety.

The record of the risk assessment can take a number of formats, the standard form can be obtained from the Safety Office.